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AUTHOR Indrebo, Astri Mueller; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Like many countries, Norway in the 1980s decentralized many government functions including public education. However, there was concern over maintaining common national education goals and evaluating schools' performance. Decentralization in schools also included school-based evaluation, evaluation done by and in the school. Three studies of school-based evaluation looked for interrelations among leadership, evaluation, and development. The first study of principals and teachers at 33 primary schools found that the schools varied considerably in how they defined self-evaluation and the methods they used. The second study was an indepth examination of one school involved in self-evaluation. It found that self-evaluation was largely management driven and received mixed reviews from school personnel. The third study, a survey of teachers and members of self-evaluation planning groups, found that schools need sufficient time to prepare for self-evaluation before outside groups can use the information gathered. In conclusion, school-based evaluation seems to be worthwhile, but schools struggle with organization and with the realization that evaluation is a democratic and investigative process. Also, the role of the school leader is crucial for initiating and maintaining school-based evaluation in ways that meet teachers' approval. (Contains 47 references.) (JPT)

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School-Based Evaluation

Three Norwegian Studies

by

Astri Mueller Indrebo,
Oppland College,
P.O. box 1004,
N 2601 LILLEHAMMER,
Norway,
Fax nr. + 61 26 07 50

Lars Monsen,
Oppland College,
P.O. box 1004,
N 2601 LILLEHAMMER,
Norway,
Fax nr. + 61 26 07 50

Trend Alvik,
Bislet College,
Pilestredet 52,
N 0167 OSLO,
Norway,
Fax nr. + 22 45 43 05

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Paper presented at the AERA annual meeting, Atlanta,
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School-based evaluation: Three Norwegian Studies

By Astri Müller Indrebo, Lars Monsen, and Trond Alvik

ABSTRACT

Indrebo, A. M., Monsen, L. & Alvik, T. 1993: School-based evaluation: Three Norwegian Studies. Paper presented the AERA annual meeting in Atlanta. - In this paper we present three studies aimed at investigating what happens in schools that, either voluntarily or because they are involved in evaluation courses, try to evaluate aspects of their own activity. The ultimate aim of the research project is to look for possible interrelations between leadership, evaluation and development. In the first part of the paper we briefly outline some characteristics concerning education in Norway in the 1980s, as well as some theoretical assumptions underlying the research. In the middle part, methods and findings are reported for each of the three studies. The paper ends with a discussion of issues which emerge from the findings. School-based evaluation so far seems to be experienced as a worth-while activity, but the schools struggle with problems of how to organise the process and how to realise evaluation as a democratic and investigative process. The role of the school leader seems to be crucial for initiating and maintaining school-based evaluation in ways that the teachers find satisfactory.

BACKGROUND: SOME CHARACTERISTICS CONCERNING EDUCATION IN NORWAY IN THE 1980s

Like many other countries, Norway in the 1980s for various reasons witnessed a wave of decentralization in the Civil Service. For the school system this process quickly prompted a question about how it is possible within a decentralized concept

- a. to guide the education towards common national goals, and
- b. to keep the overview of the school system, its mode of operation and its results, which supposedly is a precondition in order to realise point a.

In 1987 the national policies for education in Norway were reviewed by a group of OECD examiners, and among other things they asserted that

[it] seems necessary for the center to reappraise its role, not in order to try to take back the powers that it has ceded, but to establish its influence by asserting the national norms which should be expected of all local authorities and their schools, by creating means of monitoring and evaluating and by publishing their evaluations (OECD 1990:45).

Later in their report, the examiners point out that "[t]he monitoring and evaluation functions seem largely absent from the reformed Norwegian system for education" (*ibid*: 49). The authorities therefore will have to develop an evaluative and monitoring function. As far as the schools are concerned, the examiners

hope that they will develop a strong practice of self-critique and self-evaluation and at the same time will be able to seek help from external evaluation (*ibid*:50).

In other words: When traditional ways of guiding and managing civil service, like centrally fixed budgets, rules and regulations are weakened, the importance of evaluation is increased. Thus the function of evaluation and its role in education was put on the agenda in its full length.

The OECD review of the Norwegian school system coincided with other currents at the time:

- > Unemployment tended to increase and economic resources were shrinking, and consequently the need for maintaining competitive power and quality in trade and industry came to the fore. In OECD's words: "In sum, there is a variety of powerful economic and technological arguments behind the current interest in the quality of education" (OECD 1989:20).
- > The idea of user influence upon private and public services had become widely adopted, so that "everybody" thought they had the right to know about, and if necessary to criticize, what was going on in the schools.
- > The topicality of evaluation also may be understood in the perspective of compensatory legitimization: "Evaluation, whether we like it or not, is a profoundly political process, and its potential for purposes of legitimating the authority of the evaluator [...] is a key element in this process" (Weiler 1990:60; House 1992:113).
- > The State Authorities in Norway in 1985/86 decided that Management By Objectives - with its explicit emphasis on the evaluation phase - was to be regarded as the principal way of conceptualizing public administration.
- > In the perspective of postmodernism, the belief and interest in the "great connections" have gradually decreased and partly been replaced by a concentration upon events closer in space and time; events that one can more easily judge and do something about. OECD highlights this point when they assert that "In a number of OECD countries, education has become markedly "politicised". There is no longer a clear social consensus about goals" (OECD 1989:24).

In sum, during the 1980s several tendencies combined and led public interest towards evaluation, quality measurement and quality maintenance. This interest was especially directed towards the educational system, and it manifested itself in a variety of ways, from a primitive look-out for the supposedly incompetent teachers to a more serious interest in quality development by raising the school organization's ability to learn from its own practice.

THE ESTABLISHING OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

Situations and ideas affecting the choice of focus and perspectives

The situation described above can be regarded as a backdrop against which the present research project emerged. In 1988 the Education department at Oppland college was assigned by the official organization "Leadership in schools" to develop a course and a textbook for school leaders and teachers about school self-evaluation. One year later, in 1989, the Education department entered into an agreement with "Program for Research on Education" under the Norwegian Council for Research on Science and Humanities, concerning a three year research project named "Leadership, evaluation and development in educational institutions".

On the basis of the contract we decided to concentrate our efforts upon the *school-based aspect* of educational evaluation. There were several reasons for this:

- > As mentioned above, the Education department was already assigned to develop a course and a textbook concerning school self-evaluation.
- > The emphasis placed by the OECD examiners upon the development of a strong practice of self-critique and self-evaluation in Norwegian schools.
- > We were acquainted with Helen Simons' ideas about school self-evaluation through her book

Getting to know schools in a democracy (1987b), and gradually developed a very fruitful contact with her.

> Likewise, we were strongly influenced by Ernest House and his conception of evaluation as an ethical project; not just a technical one (House 1980).

> The necessity of trying to realise two basic principles in the Norwegian curriculum for both primary and secondary education, namely the principles of democracy and a questioning and systematic attitude towards reality.

> Our dedication to the idea of "teacher as researcher", as this has been developed and practised for instance at the University of East Anglia (Stenhouse 1975; Elliott 1990).

> A firm belief in the desirability of establishing "ownership" concerning evaluation procedures among those affected by the process and its results (Brennan & Hoadley 1984).

> The necessity of establishing evaluation procedures which, according to Wise and Darling-Hammond (1985: 28) are credible "only where teachers are considered a professional resource rather than the object of bureaucratic scrutiny" (see also Broadfoot & Osborn 1988:286).

> Together with the contracts signed in 1989 and 1990, the Education department at Oppland college received a request from the local county school director, who asked if it was possible to arrange a comprehensive course for schools about school-based evaluation. The course presented an opportunity to try out some of the ideas, concepts and procedures concerning school-based evaluation mentioned above as well as a possibility of collecting the first sample of data on which to build the evolving theoretical base for the research project.

Theoretical base for the project

Ideas like the ones presented in the previous section permeate recent theory and research in education (Bollen & Hopkins 1987; Carr 1989; Darling-Hammond 1990; Fullan 1985 and 1991; McKelvey & Kyriacou 1985; Richardson 1990; Schön 1990; Sirotnik 1987; Smyth 1989a). A broad description of the state of research concerning school-based evaluation is also given in the report from a conference at Oppland college in Lillehammer (Alvik, Indrebo & Monsen 1992).

The way we see it, much of the thinking can be structured around the two principles laid down in the Norwegian curriculum guidelines, namely a democratic and inquiring approach to the evaluation and decision-making in schools. Ferris (1992:343) puts it this way:

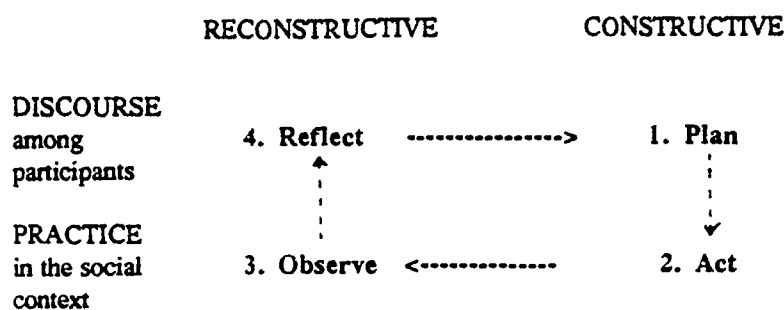
School-based decision making is an effort to capitalize on the information available at the school level to improve the educational performance of public schools. As authority is decentralized, there also exists the potential for stimulating other sources of enhanced performance such as teacher empowerment, parental and community involvement, and school leadership, depending on the specific structure of school decentralization.

Mohrman et al. (1992) come to similar conclusions in their discussion of employee involvement in schools. Cousins & Earl (1992) present participatory evaluation as an extension of the stakeholder-based model, and assert theoretical support for this approach "stemming primarily from the view that knowledge is socially constructed and memories are developed and shared by organization members" (*ibid*:397). In their article Cousins & Earl review a total of 31

studies on organizational learning, on the basis of which they conclude that "participatory evaluation offers a powerful approach to the improvement of educational organizations by creating learning systems that enhance organizational learning and, consequently, lead to better informed decisions" (*ibid*:411).

Organizational learning through a participatory approach actualizes ethical as well as methodological perspectives. From an ethical point of view it is important that information collected must be reported without harm, in other words, so that no one feels "overrun" (Simons 1987a; Brennan & Hoadley 1984).

The methodological aspects of the inquiry process are described by writers like Stenhouse (1975), Brennan & Hoadley (1984) and Elliott (1990). Here we want to emphasize the perspective presented by Carr & Kemmis (1986:186) through their figure named "The 'moments' of action research":



Carr and Kemmis comment upon their figure in this way (*ibid*.:187):

The self-reflective spiral links reconstruction of the past with construction of a concrete and immediate future through action. And it links the discourse of those involved in the action with their practice in the social context. Taken together, these elements of the process create the conditions under which those involved can establish a programme of critical reflection both for the organization of their own enlightenment and for the organization of their own collaborative action for educational reform.

The term "school-based evaluation"

As a consequence of our theoretical approach, we by this term mean evaluation done *in* and *by* the single school, for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the background as well as the effects of its own practices. In this respect we are strongly influenced by the concept of "theory-oriented evaluation" presented by Franke-Wikberg & Lundgren (1980). As its working definition of school-based evaluation the project chose a slightly modified version of the one presented by Kemmis (1982:222)¹. In our words:

School-based evaluation is the process of collecting information and implementing procedures which makes it possible for those involved to participate in continuous, systematic and critical discussions of educational enterprises and their intentions, conditions, progress and results.

¹ Evaluation is the process of marshalling information and arguments which enable interested individuals and groups to participate in the critical debate about a specific programme.

In the choice of wording we were also influenced by Zeichner (1991:371), who stresses that "ways must be found to create conditions within schools so that all groups can participate in a meaningful way in [the deliberations about school policies]".

Through processes conducted along the lines suggested here, it should be possible to capture both the factual and the experienced aspects of an educational enterprise, and to direct the evaluation towards deeper understanding of the interplay between conditions, processes and results. Likewise, it is conceivable that such a process may meet the requirements laid down in the guidelines mentioned in the previous section, namely that the procedures chosen ought to

- > contribute to a practice of strong self-evaluation in Norwegian schools,
- > reflect evaluation as a fundamentally ethical enterprise,
- > realise the principles of democracy and inquiry laid down in the Norwegian curriculum and in that respect also make allowances for the ideas of "ownership", "teacher as researcher", and "teachers as a professional resource".

The division into sub-projects

The research staff has consisted of three persons: one project leader who, by agreement, can dedicate a specified amount of his annual work on the project, one full-time research fellow who is supposed to develop a doctoral thesis on the basis of her work, and a third fellow who is supposed to devote the part of his job ordinarily reserved for research to the project. In addition, professor Helen Simons has been connected to the project as guest researcher for parts of the time. This group has worked in close cooperation around the three studies presented below. The questions which the studies in common try to illuminate, are

- > What happens in schools trying to evaluate themselves?
- > To what extent do the schools manage to realise ideas and principles of school-based evaluation, as these are described in the literature about such enterprises?
- > What problems do the schools encounter in their work with school-based evaluation?

PROCEDURES AND RESULTS

Astri Müller Indrebo:

What happens in schools evaluating their own practice?

The purpose of the study

The aim of this section of the paper is to explore a wide range of issues concerning what happens in schools that start an internal evaluation with the intention of creating a systematic and continuing learning process and to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The kind of collaborative, formative, school based evaluation described here can be seen as a form of action research, defined as a process of planning, observing and data collecting, and reflecting to improve educational practice.

This part of the paper discusses some of the factors which seem to be essential to initiate, implement and sustain the internal evaluation process in primary schools, and the role of school leaders in the process.

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Methods for the collection of data

The basis for the issues identified here is data that stem from a series of interviews with principals and teachers in 33 primary schools undertaking school self-evaluation during 1990 - 1992 in a county in Norway. The study gave us the possibility to test the theoretical conception of school self-evaluation as briefly outlined in the preceding section.

From each of these 33 schools, the principal and two teachers attended four training sessions in school-based evaluation over a period of one year. Simultaneously, the participants were supposed to plan and conduct collaborative evaluation projects in their own school together with their colleagues. The schools were free to choose the focus of the evaluation project and the methods of data collection.

The study reported here draws on two kinds of empirical evidence. The first is interviews with the participants of the course and teachers in the project schools. Of the 33 schools, 8 were chosen for in-depth study. These were chosen to represent the variety of schools of different sizes, locations and levels in the region. From each of these schools, a series of interviews was held with the principal, the two teachers attending the course and 2-3 other teachers, chosen at random, at different intervals during the process and one year after they had finished their project. In the 25 other schools an interview was conducted a year after they had finished the evaluation project.

The second data base is oral and written material (eg. development plans, designs, instruments) and reports from the schools outlining the process they had conducted, and the result of their experience.

What we have learned

Schools varied considerably with regard to the issues they addressed, the methods they used, and the planning and implementation processes they adopted. Different strategies had their strengths and weaknesses, but overall the similarities between the schools regarding problems and disagreements are far more predominant than the differences.

A brief overview on the results so far may serve as a background for a discussion of critical elements in the process of school self-evaluation in primary schools. What follows is an examination of four key issues that seem significant and discriminating in coming to an understanding of why and how some schools sustained an ongoing process of evaluation after two years, while others failed to do so.

1. Collegiality and collaboration

A key factor in those schools which maintained the process, was the experience of collegiality and collaboration. That these factors are critical in the change process, is well documented in the research literature (Fullan 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves 1991; Lieberman 1988; Simons 1989). Our research clearly reinforces this view, indicating yet again the "collective locus of control" to be important. This means building into the process supportive procedures such as:

- > a focus on shared goals and aims, as a basis for the evaluation work,
- > a sharing of certain key principles concerning the purpose and nature of the evaluation.

- > a focus on shared decision-making,
- > the identification and choice of evaluation issues as the outcome of negotiation and collaboration between the majority of the staff,
- > co-ordination by a small (planning) group,
- > commitment to a few key goals,
- > a concern to keep others constantly informed of what is happening.

A collaborative culture and adequate structures appear to be an important precondition for creating an on-going evaluation process in schools, but we also observed that school self-evaluation can help to create a culture of collaboration and change. This was an issue more dependent on the culture of the school and the priorities of the principal, than actually the amount of time available. Schools that gave high priority to collaborative work, created time and structures to further such activities. Here the principal was a key person for the administration and allocation of resources.

2. The importance of leadership

The second factor which appeared to be critical, was the dimension of leadership. Two features of leadership roles seemed particularly relevant to continuation of the process. The first relates to the dilemma faced by the principals between maintaining power and control on the one hand, and the possibility of creating commitment and participation in the teaching staff on the other. One aspect of this dilemma of power versus empowerment is clearly illustrated in the question: how active should the principal be in the evaluation process, and in what ways?

On the basis of statements from the teachers and the fate of the evaluation project in the individual school, the answer to this question is quite clear: the commitment and interest of the principal is essential to the staff's motivation for such a demanding and extensive process. The teachers want the school leaders to put self-evaluation on the agenda, start the process and make sure it maintains its momentum.

Contrary to what one might think, however, the principals themselves stressed their own importance less than the teachers did. Given the choice, most of them preferred to work together with the teachers in an internal work group (a planning group) responsible for leading the schools' self-evaluation. Their activity varied widely. In most cases the principal held a central position in the planning group during the introduction and motivation phases, but in several schools s/he assumed a more discreet role as the evaluation process progressed.

The critical factor was whether the principal on the one hand took over the whole job, with enthusiasm to get the job done or to spare staff from extra work; or, on the other hand, was a passive observer. In the more "successful" schools the principal acted as a leader, but not as a chief. This means that s/he was sensitive of the knowledge and competence of the staff, supported the teachers to take leadership responsibilities, and allowed those critical questions to be asked which were necessary to achieve better teaching and learning. The role of the school leader was to keep an overview of the process, intervening only when it seemed necessary.

The second feature we observed, was that the relationship between the planning team and the other staff proved critical to the active participation of the staff. In many schools we observed that active, strong steering on the part of the planning group, bred passivity and some opposition among their colleagues. Some of the planning groups became so exclusive and development-oriented that they were further distanced from their colleagues. It is easy to forget that planning groups have an advantage over the other members; they go through a learning process not experienced by the rest of the staff.

The method of selecting members to these groups seemed to be critical; if members of staff took turns being in the group, acceptance and involvement seemed to increase, and exclusivity was prevented. The data strongly indicate that shared responsibility is a key concept to make self-evaluation an interesting, productive and reflective enterprise for all staff. Changing the culture of the school toward a more self-evaluating practice throughout the school is the agenda, rather than implementing a single one-off innovation project. It is important to get a conception of the evaluation process, what it looks and feels like.

These findings illustrate some of the many difficulties implicit in the relationship between leadership and involvement in an evaluation process. The problem may occur irrespective of whether the principal or other members of staff are assigned the role of leaders.

3. The perspective of locus

A third factor central to creating an on-going evaluation process, was the nature of the project itself, its focus and importance for the practicing teacher. Projects that were felt to be useful to the ordinary teacher, worthwhile to invest time and energy in - such as groups of teachers evaluating each others' lessons, students' opinions of the teachers' teaching in the classroom, the staff's evaluation of both form and intent of their collective collaboration time - was a highly supportive factor. Schools that chose "non-risk" issues, like for example evaluating the students' use of the apparatuses in the playground, were often successful in completing the project of school self-evaluation, but encountered the additional problem with colleagues of the results seeming self-evident, if not trivial. In such cases, new evaluation projects were not likely to be met with enthusiasm.

What this suggests, is that if the aspiration is to create an on-going process within the school, the focus of the initial study must be connected to an issue that the staff find important and relevant, but not risky. Our data also suggest that it is best to start small, to experiment and then adjust the process to increase the confidence amongst colleagues while conducting school self-evaluation. These findings are similar to those noted by Simons (1992).

4. The initiation process

Another key factor is the way the evaluation project was introduced to the staff. The introduction phase appeared to be very important both from a motivational perspective and for practical reasons. Schools starting the process by extensive discussion of the aim of an internal evaluation process, the contents and values of such an activity, the need for openness, collaboration and shared responsibility, seem to a certain extent to have created an atmosphere

of security and knowledge in the collegium that furthers the evaluation process.

Concluding remarks

School self-evaluation seems to hold high potential for developing schools from inside. Two and a half years into the process, the majority of schools have made progress, but the need for further development is still evident. The evidence from this study suggests that school self-evaluation potentially can contribute to development and change in schools increasing the teachers' awareness of how they could improve their teaching through a process of collective and critical inquiry. This activity also seems to strengthen the norms which make for a more collaborative work environment. Furthermore, it offers promise that professional knowledge can be articulated and evaluated by teachers themselves, although more work is needed to persuade the teachers to engage in more in-depth analysis and documentation of their work. At its best, school self-evaluation may extend the collective basis within the school and thereby provide better learning opportunities for children.

However, in spite of the many positive experiences, school-based evaluation is not an activity that seems to be able to sustain itself in a hostile environment or in a school culture with large conflicts. In such schools evaluation tended to be regarded as just another duty or obligation placed upon teachers. And, not surprisingly in this context, the evaluation process as a schoolwide activity was usually very shortlived. In nearly all the schools there had been some initial resistance to the idea of school-based evaluation. This resistance was seldom expressed openly, but was manifest in many subtle ways during the process. The observed tendency for teachers to adopt a more favourable attitude toward this kind of evaluation after having some experience of it, emerged as a fairly pervasive impression.

Trond Alvik:

Close-up of the process in a single school

Background, method and milestones

This sub-project consists of a case study of one urban school, named Hillside, which tries to carry out the idea of school-based evaluation in practice. The school has 450 pupils aged 13 - 16 and a total staff of 50. From the spring of 1991 and at least until summer 1993, the observer pays visits to the school on average once a week, talking with groups of teachers, observing the progress of their work, handing out and collecting questionnaires, and conducting interviews. The interviews are taped, and then type-written in a partly condensed form. A detailed log is written from each school visit, and the log is continuously checked by the steering group for the project.

35 out of 45 teachers have chosen to participate in the school-based evaluation project, starting their work at the beginning of the autumn term 1992. Three teachers preferred to start in January 1993, while seven teachers wanted not to take part in the project at all, but instead to do some other work for the school, such as repairing physics equipment, classifying books in the library and so on. It was decided that the school-based evaluation project was to receive the following amount of time resources in the following school year: Three whole work-days with

the dates decided in advance, and ten "floating" hours, which gives a total of 28 hours. With 35 participants this gives a sum of about 1.000 work hours. In addition, each group could agree to use parts of the untied teacher work time for their evaluation project. A list of projects and number of participants is given in Appendix.

The groups are supposed to finish their projects at the end of the spring term and to write short reports of their work. The school will also conduct an internal evaluation of its school-based evaluation project, separate from what will appear through the case study. On the basis of the combined impressions from the school years 1991 - 1993, the staff will eventually decide > if - and in what form - the idea of school-based evaluation will be carried out at Hillside in the school year(s) to come,
> what areas of development to give preference to on the basis of the findings from the school-based evaluation.

Results

On the basis of observation, interview and questionnaire data, it is possible to draw the following tentative conclusions:

1. The discussion about school-based evaluation at Hillside was initiated at the management level. The teachers seem to have accepted this initiative and the subsequent process leading to a joint decision and to practical arrangements. It seems to be of special importance that the management displayed an active interest during this preparatory phase, e.g. by regularly attending the meetings that were held.
2. It also seems important that those in charge of the process did not force the pace, but gave the teachers ample time to discuss the new idea and get accustomed to it.
3. The staff at Hillside school received the idea about school-based evaluation with mixed feelings. Very few of the teachers had a completely positive or negative view of the matter. Those who displayed more positive than negative attitudes to school-based evaluation, concentrated upon the following two reasons:
 - a. Plans for development ought to be based upon firm knowledge about the actual situation.
 - b. School-based evaluation can enhance teacher competence.Those whose feelings are more negative than positive, gave these main reasons:
 - a. School-based evaluation takes too much time.
 - b. School-based evaluation may reveal or generate conflicts among the staff.
4. The fact that participation in the school-based evaluation project was made voluntary undoubtedly played a role for the gradual development of acceptance towards the idea.
5. During the autumn term of 1992, the work time devoted to the school-based project at Hillside amounted to about 560 hours altogether. With 35 participants, this gives about 16 hours per capita. However, the effort put into the projects varied quite a lot, from considerably less than 15 hours up to about 35 hours per capita.
6. Generally, the groups of teachers participating in the school-based evaluation quickly developed a strong sense of "ownership" towards their projects. Likewise, it seems as if the teachers find this way of researching experienced problems rewarding. They express the

expectation that, through the projects, it may be possible to gain deeper insight in the fields chosen.

7. However, there is a general complaint about the time resources. More than half the projects find it difficult to make sufficient time for cooperation during the busy school week.

8. Of the two principles laid down in M87, the principle of a questioning and systematic attitude towards reality seems best taken care of so far at Hillside. Several information collection methods have been employed, with questionnaire as by far the most popular one (this in spite of strong advice to use this method with care).

9. The principle least realised so far in the school-based evaluation process at Hillside is the principle of democracy. The teachers have nearly completely made the projects their own, with practically no participation by pupils or parents in either of the project phases. The group members give two main reasons for this state of affairs: a. It is too early to bring other parties into the process; the teachers first need to get acquainted with the idea and methods of school-based evaluation; b. The problems chosen do not easily lend themselves to investigation by parents or pupils.

10. The projects have received an average of about 1.5 hours of guidance from the external observer/counsellor during the autumn 1992. All the projects experience this amount as sufficient.

Lars Monsen:

How is school-based evaluation implemented in a sample of Norwegian schools? A survey

Method

In this study a questionnaire was sent to 412 municipalities in Norway with a letter to the school superintendent, asking her/him to pick out one to three schools with some experience in school-based evaluation. The principal in each of the schools picked out by the superintendent was asked to find two teachers and a member of the planning group. All these four members from each school were asked to answer the questionnaire. From many schools we received only one response, and the total number of completed questionnaires was 329. This means that we have got an answer from less than 1/4 of the municipalities in Norway. However, this response must be looked upon as a encouraging, in view of the early stage of development as concerns school-based evaluation in Norway. In fact, many schools have initiated developmental work with school-based evaluation *before* a national system of school evaluation has been worked out. Very few (46) of the schools have gone through any courses in evaluation, even though many more have experience from other courses for school-leaders (where some may have got an introduction to evaluation problems).

All these considerations taken together, the response can be interpreted as a sign of the growing awareness among Norwegian principals and teachers of the importance of the schools ability to work out their own evaluation scheme and be on top of a fast running debate on quality issues (Granheim *et.al.* 1990).

Results

What have the schools achieved so far and how do they feel about this first experience?

We will approach an answer to this through five sub-questions.

1. How is school-based evaluation organized and implemented?

In most of the schools the evaluation is done by a planning group with the principal as a leader. Both the principal and the teachers see the principal as very active in the process (65%). But with a strong democratic spirit in Norwegian schools they regard it as important to involve all different groups in the evaluation process (65%), compared to 7% who delegate the evaluation to an elected group among the teachers and only one school who has delegated the responsibility to outside experts.

On the question of what methods were used this year for school-based evaluation, we found these results:

Questionnaire to pupils	55%
Questionnaire to parents	35%
Questionnaire to the teachers	50%
Tests to find out if pupils learn as expected	20%
Other methods (interview, observation, etc.)	31%

Questionnaire is the dominating method, probably because most teachers are acquainted with this method and find it easy to use. Rather few find it necessary to use tests as a part of their evaluation. We have many other expressions of this scepticism among other Norwegian teachers towards tests as a useful and valid measure of what schools have achieved. Of course this result can also be explained by a lack of knowledge among most teachers and principals about tests and how to use them.

2. What has been evaluated?

As we can expect from the answers above, teachers in Norway are not so concerned about what the individual pupil learns when they start working with school-based evaluation. This impression was confirmed when the respondents were asked what their schools have evaluated this year. Among the possible alternatives, these received most marks:

The school's development plan	64%
Climate/pupils' well-being	56%
Efforts directed towards the pupils	47%

These figures can be compared with alternatives more directly related to the teachers' work in the classroom such as "Our own teaching methods" (32%) and "The pupils' learning results" (27%). These figures may be explained when we point out the fact that many principals and teachers have taken courses in school development work and that the national curriculum in Norway emphasises the schools' responsibility to make their own local curriculum and development plans. The figures may be interpreted as an understanding of the importance of evaluating this development work. The national debate about quality and evaluation may have

had the consequence of pushing municipalities and individual schools to bring evaluation into their developmental efforts.

3. For what purpose is the information collected?

The answer to this question may possibly be found in the importance many schools in Norway place upon their developmental work. When they choose among three different values for each alternative, the following get the most marks under the alternative "To a great extent":

- To improve the school's development program (41%),
- To improve the school's curriculum (26%).

These answers can be contrasted with

- To inform parents and the community (13%)
- To inform superintendent/the school board" (15%).

So far we may conclude that the schools working with school-based evaluation mostly on their own initiative, are not much concerned with informing groups and superiors outside the school. They seem more interested in finding out how their own school improvement efforts function. This internal use of the evaluation can be seen as a consequence of their need to learn together to use evaluation methods, and to discuss the results in a collegial forum before they find the time ripe for going to external groups with this information (cf. Simons 1987b:203).

4. What are the most important results of the evaluation efforts?

When the respondents are asked to rank the three most important results as they see it from their own point of view, the following alternatives received the most responses:

- We have learned to work more systematically (15%),
- We have become more conscious of how we use our time and resources (13%)
- We all work together towards the same goals (13%).

The same alternatives also got the most marks when the respondents were asked to consider what their colleagues would have answered, with just a small difference in percentages. But we can also see that other alternatives ranked nearly as high.

Among the alternatives which received much fewer marks, we can pick out

- The pupils learn more (6%)
- We have got a more open relationship to the community (2%).

As we can see, the conclusion in point 3 is partly confirmed, but with the additional observation that the marks are quite evenly distributed among the alternatives. It doesn't seem possible to point to a few results which most schools would agree upon as *the* most important ones, as seen from the standpoint of the teachers and principals. The only issue upon which they agree is that pupil learning and improvement in the relationship to the community are *not* important results.

We then turn to the schools' experiences with barriers and difficulties in developing the evaluation scheme they now use. Is there more agreement here than on the question of results?

5. Which difficulties do the schools find it most difficult to cope with?

In connection with this question the respondents filled out 10 items on a Likert-scale with four steps. When we add "very important" and "important", we get the following most difficult barriers:

We didn't have enough time to work with school-based evaluation	(86%)
We knew too little about school-based evaluation	(81%)
Differing opinions among our colleagues	(38%)
Lack of resources to work out the scheme	(32%)
Too little commitment among our colleagues	(30%)

The other items get 12% or less when we add two steps on the scale.

The agreement here can be interpreted as a sign of the most common difficulties of teachers in coping with school-based evaluation. As is known from research about school improvement in general, lack of time resources/other resources as well as knowledge and skills are well known problems for collaborative development work in schools. We may conclude that school-based evaluation has to cope with the same problems and barriers as are known from school improvement in general (Fullan 1991). In this regard school-based evaluation does not seem to be a special activity, and much can be learned from the school improvement literature.

Conclusion

The survey from which we have here presented a few results, has given us few surprises compared to the in-depth studies presented in the previous sections. As in our follow-up schools and in Hillside, we see the same tendencies to look inwards and to be mostly concerned with establishing and learning to run the complex process of school-based evaluation. The teachers find it necessary to develop their competence. Therefore we see the importance of having enough time to learn and enough time to work together, *before* outside groups can expect interesting information for their own use.

DISCUSSION

When we combine the data from our three sub-projects, certain patterns emerge. These patterns will be commented upon below under ten subheadings. We wish to underline the tentative character of our statements, due to the fact that the research projects are not yet finished.

The importance of leadership

School leaders, especially at the building level, seem to play an important role in launching and following up the idea of school self-evaluation (see also Clift *et al.* 1987:208). In an interview study carried out early in the project, Alvik (1991) similarly found that respondents chiefly judge the management's role in evaluation as positive for the teachers and important in relation to the development of the school. Such findings also are consonant with results from the school

effectiveness research (Reynolds 1992). The leaders' importance manifests itself in symbolic as well as in practical ways. Symbolically, it seems important that the leaders show their interest by giving this theme priority in their time schedule. On the practical side the leaders' job is to make sure that the self-evaluation processes are carried out as decided. At the same time the leaders must identify with the teachers and fully understand that self-evaluating processes may be experienced as threatening.

It seems important that school leaders are aware of their powerful role in the internal evaluation process. The role of leadership is not as straightforward as we are frequently led to believe in statements constantly referring to principals as the key to change (Indrebo 1992). The message from our studies is that the principals critically reflect on whether their role is facilitating change or placing limits on what can be done. This means that the school management must also expose itself to criticism and that the relationship between the leadership and the rest of the school should become a part of the evaluation agenda. In addition, as Smyth (1989b) points out, it is important that the school leader does not automatically identify with "value-free" expectations of efficiency and reporting of results, but makes sure that such ideas, too, become part of the critical process examining the practice of the school.

Choice of themes: the perspectives of size and time

If school-based evaluation is to be carried out as a democratic and investigative process within restricted resource frames, it seems necessary to limit the size and comprehensiveness of the project. Data from our research show that schools need advice and experience in the necessity of delimiting what they are going to scrutinize (Indrebo 1991a). This process takes time. It also takes time for the staff to get acquainted with the idea of school-based evaluation and to work on the problem of anxiety which is often aroused in connection with such a project.

Choice of themes: confrontation or niche

When the staff of a school starts to discuss what to evaluate, differences of opinion may be (re)activated. These differences can be handled in at least two ways, placed as extremes on a continuum (Tiller 1991). The confrontational approach implies thorough discussions, where values, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in the system are revealed and scrutinized. This approach is closely connected to the expectation that the whole school decides one single theme to be investigated throughout the evaluation project. - The term "niche", on the other hand, pictures a process whereby the evaluation groups choose different themes for study, and explore them independently. Regardless of where they start, it seems necessary for schools to be prepared to move back and forth on the continuum between the two principal approaches.

In our sample of schools we find both approaches represented. Data from the survey indicate a predominance of common choice of themes. The follow-up schools and Hillside for the most part chose a niche-approach, postponing the value discussions until the time when the different groups present their ideas, findings, and conclusion to the rest of the staff.

There are at least a couple of possible explanations of the differences in findings. Firstly, in the survey schools there may have been niches within the general themes chosen.

Secondly, the staff in the survey schools, due to less intensive training in the field, may have a slightly different conception of school-based evaluation from what one finds in the follow-up schools and in Hillside. The themes most frequently chosen in the survey schools may have been investigated primarily in the form of an audit, located to a specific point in the school year. Such an approach was predominant in the earlier phases of school evaluation in Norway.

Choice of themes: what to evaluate?

There is a great variation in the themes chosen for evaluation. What emerges, however, is a slight tendency to choose themes at a safe distance from the class-room. (Indrebo 1991a; see also Simons 1992:13). This fact probably reflects the anxiety which many teachers feel towards self-evaluation. Such anxiety is quite understandable, and one can also argue that it is necessary to research other areas of the school organization than the teaching and learning activities. However, there may be a certain antagonism between the fact that the classrooms are to some degree withheld from scrutiny on the one hand, and the public demand for school evaluation and accountability on the other.

School-based evaluation: voluntary or compulsory?

Almost all the schools in our studies employ various forms of voluntary approaches. In some cases, one single group of teachers is in charge of the process, with the rest of the staff as mere respondents. In other cases, niche approaches are employed, with different groups voluntarily working on different themes. Even when more confrontational approaches are used, the process may end with a decision on voluntariness.

These findings again substantiate the assumption that school-based evaluation is experienced by the teachers as threatening. What, then, would be the right thing to do; accept the voluntary approach or force the whole staff to participate?

On first thought, one might fear that voluntariness will eventually create an A- and a B-team among the teachers; the gap between them widening as the A-team gains deeper insight into their own professional work. However, our findings seem to point in another direction. The processes created in a school embarking upon self-evaluation appear to have favourable effects also on those who do not take an active part in what is going on. The increased amount of discussions and investigations vitalizes the reflection among both participants and non-participants and encourages them to question established practice. This may in turn develop in the non-participants a more favourable attitude towards active participation in the school-based evaluation. Similar findings are reported by Halland & Hofstad (1992) in their study of six Norwegian secondary schools practicing self-evaluation.

The problematic principle of democracy

One of the ideas behind the present concept of school-based evaluation is that such a process ought to be carried out in cooperation between those who "hold shares" in the enterprise. This seems to be an expectation which is difficult to live up to. The general tendency is that the teachers make school-based evaluation *their own* project, using the other parties primarily as respondents. This corresponds with findings from an interview study about teachers' conception of the term "evaluation" (Alvik 1991). Although the respondents expressed an

interest in developing procedures whereby viewpoints from the different parties are taken care of, they conceive of evaluation as an activity for which teachers have the prime responsibility. These findings further correspond with experiences concerning school-based curriculum planning, which is also for the most part done by the teachers themselves, although the central guidelines assume the planning to be done in cooperation with parents and pupils (Monsen 1993).

The reluctance to include other parties in the decision and investigative processes is understandable in relation to the sensitive character of the enterprise. When asked why school-based evaluation is made a teacher-controlled activity, the main answer given is that the project themes so far are not suited for investigation by other groups. However, most of the teachers foresee a cooperation with the other parties as they themselves gain experience and confidence in the ideas and processes of school-based evaluation.

The problematic principle of inquiry

Another idea behind school-based evaluation is that it should be carried out in a systematic and investigative manner. To realise this principle, it is necessary to use methods for information collection as well as to establish procedures whereby the information can be discussed and acted upon.

Teachers in general have limited experience with data collection methods (Clift *et al.* 1987:208; Simons 1992:12; Alvik 1991). Schools that have embarked upon school-based evaluation, confirm the need for guidance in methodological questions. Our data show that questionnaire is the method used most frequently, although as much as 31 % of the schools in the survey study report that they use methods like interview, observation, etc. The questionnaire method is also a method which is experienced as problematic, once one has made use of it. This method seems so easily resorted to because questionnaires are expected to provide much information within short time spans, give the inquiry a "scientific" image and exempt from the challenging, direct contact with the respondent.

Once information has been collected, it is necessary to establish fora where it can be validated and where one can discuss the need for further data. As mentioned above, this is also a sore point for many schools; it is generally difficult to make room for such activities on the weekly schedule and to establish sufficiently democratic procedures. Consequently, the evaluation process will survive only in especially motivated groups or in groups that have a special responsibility to perform such activities.

The roles of "outsiders"

There are at least two interrelated reasons for a school to employ persons from outside in the school-based evaluation. Firstly, the employment of outsiders may enhance the credibility of the evaluation because the person in question does not have stakes to defend. Secondly, a person from outside may give guidance concerning vital questions, methods and procedures in school-based evaluation (Booth 1987).

Our data show that schools very seldom by themselves take steps to employ outsiders. This

again can be understood in the light of the anxiety connected to school self-evaluation and the need expressed by the teachers to control the process, at least in the trying-out phase. However, some of the schools have had access to researchers who, because of their investment in what is going on, have agreed to give some guidance concerning methodological questions and, to a certain extent, take part in the discussion about what and how to evaluate. The schools report this guidance as very helpful, even when kept to the modest level of some few hours per group.

The Achilles heel: from evaluation to action

An important idea behind school-based evaluation is that one prepares the ground for development by collecting and reflecting upon data which tell us something about what is going on, what results are achieved and how processes as well as results are experienced and perceived by the parties with stakes in the enterprise. For many schools, there seems to be a problem connected to the transition from evaluation via reflection to action and development. Energy is often put into the collection of information and the presentation of results, but then the process ends. In other words: it seems difficult to come to terms with the "theory-oriented" aspect of evaluation (Franke-Wikberg & Lundgren 1980). Alvik (1991) similarly found that this aspect is practically absent in teachers' conception of 'evaluation'. The reasons for findings like these can be a combination of limited understanding of the idea of school-based evaluation and the lack of structure (time, fora, leadership) for keeping the investigative process alive.

School-based evaluation: worth while?

The discussion so far has revealed certain gaps between the ideas of school-based evaluation, as these are presented in the literature, and what most schools seem able to accomplish in practice. One may therefore wonder whether such an enterprise is at all worth while. When asked about this, the teachers as well as the school leaders nearly unanimously give an affirmative answer. Evaluation in general is looked upon as an interesting and challenging activity. Absence of evaluation is considered a sign of indifference (Alvik 1991). School-based evaluation vitalizes the discussion about educational matters, stimulates the teachers' curiosity, and provides information which goes beyond mere imagination. Plans for development based upon evaluation are thus more realistic than plans conceived through pure thinking (Simons 1987b:199). Similarly, Halland & Hofstad in one of their reports from a school-based evaluation project in six upper secondary schools (1992:19) conclude: "School evaluation appears to be a powerful strategy for development. It seems as if evaluation cracks the indifference".

FURTHER RESEARCH

There is some knowledge accumulated about practice that works in school-based evaluation. Yet, there are many unresolved issues. One is the relationship between school and local authorities. Our observations of schools trying to build internal evaluative competence, point to the crucial importance of relationship with and support from the local authorities. As Simons points out: "School self-evaluation is a system responsibility" (Simons 1992:14). The

relationship between the different partners / levels in education must be formulated with greater potential for interaction between the partners .

As a result of this observation, a new training course has been established. Three or four persons from each local authority together with the local representatives of the teacher unions, were invited to go through the same training course as did the teams from the 33 schools in the county of Oppland. We will follow up how this strategy works. At present the participants are experiencing the same tensions and difficulties as the principals and teachers before them but hopefully, once they have been through the process, they will be in a better position to sustain change by building a support network outside school as well as facilitating one inside. In this way we hope to contribute to the development of an interactive environment with potential and growth for the self-evaluative, self-reflective school.

On the basis of the theory about school-based evaluation, some other problems, too, need further investigation. Firstly, the research on opinions and practices of school-based evaluation until now has mainly concentrated upon what the teachers think and do. We know comparatively little about the perspectives of groups such as pupils and parents. Secondly, because these latter groups have, until now, been involved in the process mainly as informants, the problem of evaluation as an ethical enterprise has not evolved in its full breadth. The ethical issue which is first of all to be investigated is the question of how the other parties experience the validity and the use of the data collected by the teachers.

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Appendix: List of projects and participants at Hillside

<u>Name of project</u>	<u>Number of participants</u>
What questions do we ask our pupils?	1
Peer review in pair of colleagues	2
Teachers' job satisfaction	2
The organizing of terminal examinations	2
Information currents among the staff	3
Views on elective subjects	3
Evaluation as part of an integrated general knowledge course	3
Criteria for giving marks in art subjects	3
Local curricula in English	3
How do pupils manage their homework?	4
How do we make use of the total number of teaching periods at our school?	4
Criteria for giving marks in physical education	5